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## Millennial Attitudes and Preferences of Purchasing Prescription Eyewear

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**RIT**

**Millennial Attitudes and Preferences of Purchasing  
Prescription Eyewear**

By

Monika Karlovic

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Science in Service Leadership and  
Innovation

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### Abstract

This study focused on how influential the pros and cons of buying prescription glasses in store and online were as described by millennials living in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). A qualitative research design was utilized, which included open-ended questions in a structured interview protocol. The seven participants that were interviewed were all millennials living in the GTA and have purchased eyewear online and in store. The main discoveries included participants appreciating the low prices when purchasing online, in store assistance, and the similar quality of eyewear offered online and in store. All participants stated that the fit and style of the frames influenced where they would purchase their glasses. Although current research suggests that millennials value experience and relationships with retailers over cost, it was determined that the participants considered low prices to be the driving factor in their decision making, despite being loyal to their optometrist's practice. Since online pricing is lower than in store pricing as well as participants deeming the quality of glasses similar for both purchasing options, the participants are likely to continue purchasing online in the future. Suggestions for further research are discussed as well as limitations within the study.

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## Introduction

The millennial generation is one of digital technology and have been deemed the “digital natives”, as they were born into a world filled with technology and devices that were foreign to past generations, and that “empower the customer” (Fromm & Garton, 2013). Since digital technology has been a part of the millennial’s life style since the beginning, it has been determined by researchers that the real and digital world “should not delineate” and that both worlds should “blend seamlessly” in the minds of millennials (Fromm & Garton, 2013). Many questions then arise about how retailers who depend solely on in-store traffic, such as medical service providers, can keep up with the growing presence of online competition. This study aimed to determine what this large generation of consumers considers when deciding where to buy prescription eyewear. It aimed to investigate what strengths and weakness each industry carries and what millennials look for when buying eyewear. The goal was to add research to help optical stores understand their growing online competition and customers. In addition to current research on millennial purchasing patterns, this study offers more opportunities for further research in order to expand knowledge on this topic.

### Problem Statement

It was estimated that by 2020, millennials would make up 50% of optical customers (Optometrist Quarterly Update, 2017). With this generation taking over a large portion of the customer base, it is important for independent optical stores to understand the needs and desires of their consumers. Alderson et al. (2016) were able to uncover flaws with the quality of online retailers of spectacles, and determined that there was a significant amount of consumers who preferred their in store purchases over their online glasses. However,

there seems to a gap in understanding what this large generation of people looks for when buying glasses, and how critical the medical aspect is when making a purchase. This information can aide optometrist and opticians in understanding where they need to develop their arguably outdated services in order to stay relevant in this digital generation.

The purpose of this study will be to undercover the preferences of millennials when purchasing spectacles online versus in optical in the GTA. The aim is to understand the preferred features of each service and how these preferences influence millennials' decision-making process when purchasing eyewear. This information could aide independent optical stores in understanding the needs of their largest customer base in the coming years.

### Research Question

What do millennials consider the pros and cons of online and in optical purchases? How influential are these aspects in their decision-making?

### Literature Review

#### **Understanding the millennial generation and their needs**

Millennials, defined as individuals born between 1980-1994, have been exposed to technology and “internet in their formative years”, which differs greatly from how past generations were raised (Hauser, 2016, page 28). These are young adults who are highly educated, with 61% of American millennials attending college or university, and whose lifestyles are vastly different from those of past generations (Hauser, 2016, page 28). Millennials are a unique set of individuals who display a drastic change in their needs as

customers, which changes how retailers and service providers must market themselves to appeal to this generation. As the entirety of this generation enters the work force, they will surpass the “estimated \$1.3 trillion annual consumer spending” they currently contribute in the United States (Eventbrite, 2014, page 1). As the largest generation in world history, it is critical to understand this new age and dynamic group of people who will change how modern healthcare and retail services will be provided.

Eventbrite (2014) conducted a nation wide study in the United States to uncover the ways in which millennials will contribute to the economy in the future. Their key findings include that millennials find more value in experiences than objects, prompting them to spend more money on a good experience that creates a lasting memory (Eventbrite, 2014, page 1). They also found that millennials value relationships and finding ways to deepen those relationships, which they believe is possible by experiencing events together (Eventbrite, 2014, page 5). This prompts the question of how experiences in retail affect their decision to become repeat customers. If millennials see more value in creating experiences, then can creating positive experiences for them in a retail setting ensure a deeper relationship with this generation?

Optometrist Dr. Whitney Hauser offers insight on how to appeal to millennials as both customers and as employees. She states that millennials’ “mean income has dropped five percent over the last 10 years, and student loan debt has more than doubled”, leaving them with less disposable income (Hauser, 2016, page 28). Hauser suggests understanding that millennial spending will depend greatly on necessity and that they are motivated by creating relationships rather than purchasing brand names. Millennials are also 50 percent more likely to purchase eyewear if it is connected to a good cause, such as the Toms one-



for-one program, where with a purchase of eyewear a pair is donated to someone in need (Hauser, 2016, page 27). Optometry, as well as many other medical practices, is arguably behind in their social media techniques, which can hinder their outreach to millennials. Hauser highlights that millennials are visual learners, and so social media and appealing advertisements are essential to them understanding and being attracted to particular service providers (Hauser, 2016, page 28). Additionally, because of their dependence and need for Internet and technology, it is crucial for anyone targeting this generation to have a strong online presence.

An online presence is not only important in terms of advertising and searching for company's information; it is also a vital way for millennials to review service providers and products. Reviews are essential in a millennials decision-making when choosing anything from clothing to a hairdresser or even a doctor (Mangold & Taken, 2012, page 142). Mangold and Taken Smith (2012) conducted a study that revealed that millennials are increasingly posting reviews for a wide spectrum of retailers and service providers (Mangold & Taken, 2012, page 141). With 94% of American millennials owning a cell phone, it is no surprise that there is an ease associated with going online to research where to spend their money, especially since it can be done from anywhere (Mangold & Taken, 2012, page 141). Since this generation is engulfed in social media, this platform has become a large contributor of reviews and online "word of mouth", again, making it difficult for retailers who are not online to appeal to these customers (Mangold & Taken, 2012, page 142). They concluded that this generation will post positive reviews more often than negative, and that they are strongly influenced by said reviews (Mangold & Taken, 2012, page 144). Essentially, online reviews are a staple in a millennials' decision-making

process. It is reported that 97% of millennials read online reviews before selecting a business to spend money on (Fertik, 2019). They want to understand the quality of the service since their spending is based on necessity, as well as if this is a provider they can build a relationship with based on their relationships with other consumers.

Millennials are also changing the ways in which medical care is to be provided. Their need for a “technology driven consumer environment where transparency, rapid delivery and convenience are the norm” will alter how the healthcare system will operate (Evans & Flemming, 2018). Michael Evans and Kevin Fleming (2018), contributors to *Forbes* Magazine, state that millennial “expectations may be a positive catalyst for a slow-to-change” industry (Evans & Flemming, 2018). With long waiting room cues, overdue follow-ups and high costs, many millennials are skipping essential appointments and check ups. Since this generation tended to stay in school much longer than past generations, they are either a few years into the work force, just entering or still in school. This leaves many millennials with limited to no health insurance that they do not purchase themselves (Evans & Flemming, 2018). It is reported that 44% of American millennials skipped important appointments due to high costs (Evans & Flemming, 2018). The targets of the current study are millennials living in the Greater Toronto Area in Canada. In Canada, the government covers most healthcare services with the exception of a few, including optometry. Unless an individual has private health insurance, they must pay for this medical service out of pocket. With this being the highest educated group of millennials in Canada, their needs are most definitely driven by cost, including medical needs (Petramala & Clayton, 2018, page 6). Medical practices should consider ways of connecting with

consumers digitally and break inefficient services in order to retain sustainable relationships with millennials into the future, optometrists included.

### **The independent optical store in Ontario, Canada**

In 2020, millennials will make up 50 percent of all optical store consumers, officially pushing out the Baby Boomer generation that has dominated the consumer base for much time (Optometrist Quarterly Update, 2017). Optometrists in the United States indicated that the aging population is going to increase the need for eye exams and eye surgeries such as cataracts (Optometrist Quarterly Update, 2017). Similarly, Canada will be experiencing a similar population flow as their American counterparts. A typical comprehensive eye exam in Ontario consists of a pressure test for glaucoma, auto refraction followed by a manual refraction to check sharpness of vision, full health check of the internal and external eye including dilation and retinal imaging for the optic nerve and retina (Eye trust network, 2016). It is recommended that adults have an eye exam done once every two years to maintain eye health. Additional tests such a colour test, field of vision and others can be conducted on the doctor's request if deemed necessary. It is unknown if millennials in the Toronto area are aware of the medical importance of an eye exam past the prescription portion, based on the lack of research on the topic.

Return patients are critical for optometry practices, as adults typically return every two years. Providing personalized service increases the probability of customers returning in two years time and recommending the office to family or friends (Optometrist Quarterly Update, 2019). Independent optical stores are more likely to see return patients than big box stores such as Wal Mart or Costco (Optometrist Quarterly Update, 2019). Maintaining return customers has proven to be more difficult with the presence of online eyewear

retailers. In an effort to end online sales of prescription eyewear in Ontario, the College of Optometrists of Ontario filled legal action against the sale of eyewear online in Ontario and won (Carlucci, 2018). The reasoning behind the injunction is that it is unsafe, as many prescription eyewear purchased online allegedly does not go through safety and quality testing, endangering the vision and safety of the consumer (Carlucci, 2018). Despite the backlash from frequent online shoppers, there are loopholes where individuals from Ontario can purchase glasses online from other retailers out of province. This lawsuit had many consumers believe that it was an attempt to end the online eyewear competition in Ontario, but the College insists that it is out of the safety and best interest of their patients, especially if they are filling a prescription from an Ontario office (Carlucci, 2018).

### **Quality and service of online optical stores**

In a study conducted by Alderson et al. (2016), participants from a small town in the UK were given an allowance to purchase glasses online as well as in an optical. The quality of the prescription glasses was tested against industry standards of dispensing and it is reported that a significant amount of the glasses purchased online did not meet these standards of safety and clarity (Alderson et al., 2016, page 1197). Of the glasses that did pass inspection, participants preferred the glasses that were purchased in an optical store, despite them being of similar quality (Alderson et al., 2016, page 1201). Reasons for this preference could include that consumers feel that the experience of purchasing glasses in person is more customized, with an optician working on the individual and applying adjustments based on the customer's personal needs (Alderson et al., 2016, page 1200). Although online retailers offer speed and cost friendly eyewear, for individuals who were asked to compare, in store optical purchases were more satisfying.

According to the Vision Council, there was a 600% growth in prescription eyewear purchased online between 2007 and 2017, and in 2017 there was nearly \$600 million spent on online eyewear (Schencker, 2018). As purchasing online eyewear is much cheaper than in traditional offices, many parents tend to turn to online retailers for children who easily and regularly break glasses (Schencker, 2018). Optometrists have voiced concerns about the uncertain safety of eyewear purchased online, while online retailers claim that these concerns are “overblown” (Schencker, 2018). Optometrists in Chicago reported they have not yet felt a change in their revenue due to online retailers, as their eyewear sales usually consist of one fourth to half of their profits (Schencker, 2018). Despite this, online retailers continue to grow in North America and do not show any indication of slowing down (Schencker, 2018).

With online eyewear growing, some retailers are finding ways to offer online eye exams. Richard Kestenbaum (2018), a contributor to *Forbes* magazine, outlines how online eyewear sales will “explode” once eye exams are offered online. He states that, “getting a prescription from an optometrist or ophthalmologist is a meaningful obstacle to buying prescription glasses. It adds an extra step to the process that has to be done in a physical location” (Kestenbaum, 2018). It is the perception of many young individuals that the most important portion of an eye exam is obtaining a prescription, and although it is, the health portion is arguably more critical. The health portion of the exam cannot be offered online which can lead to many people risking undetectable eye issues until they have developed. Kestenbaum also outlines how getting one’s pupillary distance (PD) measurement is made difficult by many optometrists, which leads many people to measure them using online methods offered by online retailers and often leads to poorly made spectacles

(Kestenbaum, 2018). The reasoning behind this is that the individual who is making the prescription eyewear, usually a registered optician, is responsible for all measurements that go into the glasses. Therefore, online retailers are then responsible for measuring PDs and not the optometrist performing the eye exam, as it is not part of an exam.

Opternative is an online refraction website cofounded by an optometrist, Dr. Steven Lee (Miller, 2016). Lee states that the prescriptions are “statistically equivalent” to traditional eye exams, even though they are not overseen by a doctor (Miller, 2016). There is concern with the optometry industry because Opternative called these prescription checks “eye exams” despite the fact that they post a disclaimer, which notifies patients that this prescription is not verified by a doctor (Miller, 2016). In 2017, the FDA sent a warning to Opternative because their methods of obtaining a medical prescription are not FDA approved (Kestenbaum, 2018). Although there is debate around if eye exams should and can effectively be performed online, for now it is still not officially legal although in many places the purchase of prescription eyewear is. The speed, convenience and ease of ordering online is a major contributor to the success these online retailers have experienced and is what has given them advantage over a slow moving industry.

Interestingly, the next step for many online retailers is to move to actual physical locations in order to differentiate themselves from other online competition (Mannino, 2018). This is true for many different industries including eyewear. Warby Parker, a leader in the online eyewear industry has opened 64 locations as of 2018 and aims for 100 locations (Thomas, 2018). The move to physical locations came at the request of many customers who wanted to try on glasses before purchasing them, prompting Warby Parker to open locations (Thomas, 2018). The idea is that customers can get “the brand experience

plus online convenience”, which ironically leads to innovative online retailers to revert to physical locations (Mannino, 2018). From the viewpoint of optometry, what does this mean? Many of the online retailers appeal to millennials because they are in touch with current trends and are efficient, both financially and in turn around time. What do independent optical stores run by optometrists need to consider in order to stay relevant in this new age of shopping in order to keep their patients safe and returning to their businesses? The following study aims to understand millennials’ preferred features of each service and how these preferences influence their decision-making.

### Methodology

#### **Introduction:**

This section highlights the research methodology that was utilized in this research project. Research strategy, research method, validity and reliability, method of data collection, participant selection, procedure and protocol, research limitations, data analysis and results will be discussed in further detail in this chapter.

#### **Research Strategy:**

The goal of this study was to open up the conversation about millennial purchasing preferences in relation to optical purchases. There is a gap in the literature on how optical stores, optometrists and opticians can better understand this customer in the coming years as online retailers are becoming more and more prominent. This research could provide retailers with more information on how to better design their services to match the needs and desires of their largest customer based in the coming years. This study could help develop theory for further research about optometry customers and their purchasing patterns. Specifically, the study aims to answer the research question:

RQ: What do millennials consider the pros and cons of online and in optical purchases? How influential are these aspects in their decision-making?

### **Research Method:**

A qualitative study was conducted with a structured interview protocol in order to collect data on the purchasing preferences of millennials when purchasing eyewear online and in optical. The interview consisted of open-ended questions that the participants can elaborate on to explain their thoughts and share their ideas (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design is desirable because it will provide insight on how millennials make decisions on where to buy eyewear based on the information they currently have and what the pros and cons of both services are from their perspective. Interviews are suitable for this goal because the common objective of all interviews is to discover what we cannot directly observe and learn about the participant's perspective on the subject (Greenfield & Greener, 2016).

### **Validity and Reliability:**

Grounded theory is the most commonly used approach for qualitative data, ensuring the researcher enters the study with an "open mind" in order to treat experiences and pre-existing knowledge as "provisional" and open to questioning (Denscombe, 2014). Grounded theory was used as an approach for conducting this study as it allows for the exploration of the topic without being restricted by a theoretical framework. All researched information on the topic discussed in the literature review acts as a base for the research and should not act as a bias for the results of the data. Interviewing is a good method for



grounded theory because it allows for the researcher to explore the ideas of the participants (Denscombe, 2014). This study utilized a structured interview approach in order to ensure that all questions regarding the pros and cons of both services are answered (Denscombe, 2014).

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), an emergent design process is required for qualitative research since the “initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed” and the process may change or shift based on how the interviews go (p. 182). This means the process or types of questions asked may change in the data collection process. This was present in this research project as the method of data collection had to be adjusted. Due to difficulties with scheduling for participants, the method of distribution was changed from in person interviews to an online questionnaire.

### **Method of data collection:**

A structured interview was conducted with seven participants. Majority of the participants expressed difficulties meeting in person due to work, school, and personal scheduling conflicts and voiced that they were more willing to participate in the study if it was conducted online over email. This way they could answer the questions on their own time and email the answers back to the researcher at their leisure. The researcher then decided to change the method of data collection to an online email method instead of in-person interviews.

Participants were asked eight questions, beginning with an icebreaker question to understand their demographic characteristics and then moving into their experiences and opinions on purchasing prescription eyewear. Participants were mainly asked about their

most recent experience buying in store and online, and what they liked and disliked about the process. They were also asked to elaborate on how influential these opinions are in deciding where they will purchase eyewear in the future. Additionally, they were asked to comment on their other online purchasing habits, in order to gain perspective on what this generation would and would not buy online and why.

### **Participants:**

The target participants were millennials who were born between 1980 and 1995 who live in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in Ontario, Canada. Participants wore prescription eyewear, the specifics of their prescription were deemed irrelevant, meaning the strength of the prescription and the amount of time spent wearing the eyewear per day did not affect their ability to answer the interview questions. Additionally, participants could not have any history of eye disease, in order to eliminate bias towards people who must visit their optometrist or ophthalmologist more frequently than a healthy individual. Participants were also required to have had purchased prescription eyewear in an optical store and online in order to ensure they have experienced both methods of purchasing eyewear. Participants were contacted through email or phone, as these were individuals who the researcher had connections with and fit all the outlined criteria. These individuals included colleagues, friends, family members and others who were informed about the study and asked for their participation. Before any participant could answer the interview questions, the researcher asked the participant questions regarding the requirements of the study (if they had bought glasses in store and online, if they have any eye diseases etc.) to ensure they could participate. The consent form that was sent to the participants also

clearly stated what the requirements of the study were. The consent form was signed by all participants (Appendix A).

### **Procedure and Protocol**

Following the Creswell and Creswell (2018) interview protocol, the study aimed to provide the participants with open-ended questions where they are able to express their opinions and experiences.

1. Please provide some information about yourself (your age, job/ education, hobbies and how long you have been wearing glasses).
2. When was your last eye examination? Do you tend to go to the same optometrist? Why or why not?
3. When was the last time you purchased prescription eyewear in store? Why did you choose to purchase your glasses there? Can you tell me about the experience? (What did you like or not like)
4. When was the last time you purchased prescription eyewear online? Why did you choose to purchase your glasses there? Can you tell me about the experience? (What did you like or not like)
5. What made you want to try purchasing online? Were you satisfied with the final product? Can you compare your satisfaction to when you purchase in store?
6. What other products do you purchase online? Are there any products you will not purchase online? Why?

7. What do you consider to be a difficult part of purchasing glasses? Which parts are enjoyable? How influential are these pros and cons in your decision process on where to purchase glasses?
8. If there is any other additional information you would like to add, please provide it here:

No specific template was used to frame the questions in this study. Question one was created as an icebreaker question in order to understand the demographic of the participants. Question two was designed to find out how loyal the participants are to optometrists and if they regularly see the same doctor. Questions three and four are aimed to uncover when participants last purchased glasses both online and in store and what their experience were like. Question five prompts the participants to comment on why they decided to purchase online and how they compare that experience to in store shopping. Question six was framed to uncover if the participants have any restrictions as to what is appropriate to purchase online and what is not. Finally, question seven is designed to have the participants comment on how influential the characteristics they deemed pros and cons of both services are to their decision on where to purchase prescription eyewear.

The aim of the questionnaire was to get the participants to provide insight on their opinions in order to answer the research question of the study. Additionally, the questions probe the participants to comment on their online spending habits and loyalty to optometrists. These aspects are beneficial in understanding why millennials choose to purchase online and if they would be open to buying glasses in store.

## **Limitations**

There were a few limitations that could apply to the current study. The GTA is a vastly diverse area in Ontario, both economically and culturally, therefore, the study must control for these differences between millennials in the population. Since the study consists of interviewing a small group of individuals, there is a risk of bias as it could be possible that the sample is not representative of the entire population, especially since the population of millennials in the GTA is quite high. Additionally, since this interview was conducted online, the researcher was not able to collect data on body language or ask follow up questions on interesting answers the participants provided.

### **Data Analysis**

Creswell and Creswell's (2018) qualitative data analysis process acted a guide to the data collection and analysis in this study. The raw data was categorized and organized based on the responses of the participants on HyperResearch, a qualitative research computer program. The results were analyzed by the similarities, if any, between the answers provided by these participants. Words and phrases were categorized and labeled based on their similarities and differences and this categorical information was used to code the data. Once the codes were created and applied to all of the interviews, themes emerged which allowed the researcher to further categorize the codes.

As the answers were analyzed on HyperResearch, codes were created that coincided with words or phrases that were consistent throughout multiple different participant answers. Once a concrete list of codes was created, the codes were grouped together based on five themes that emerged within the answers. These themes aided in creating an answer for the presented research question as they provided insight on what was important to the

participant in terms of the type of service they received. The themes and codes were as follows are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Theme	Codes
<b>In Store Pros (5 codes)</b>	Ability to try on frames in store High quality In optical professional assistance In store insurance coverage
<b>In Store Cons (2 codes)</b>	In store pressure to purchase Unhelpful employees
<b>Online Pros (3 codes)</b>	Cheap and easy online Large selection online Same Quality
<b>Online Cons (1 code)</b>	No Adjustments
<b>Influences (2 codes)</b>	Recommended by Friend Fit and Style

## Results

In this section, the researcher presented the results of the questionnaire that provided data to create codes and identify themes. These themes aimed to answer the research question of the study. The research question being explored is: What are the pros and cons of online and in optical purchases, and how influential are these aspects in their decision-making?

All seven participants were in their 20's and living in the GTA area at the time of the completing the questionnaire. All the participants completed post secondary studies with

five of the seven participants have varying bachelor degrees and the remaining two are college graduates.

In Store Pros:

**Ability to try frames on in store.** Four participants considered trying on frames in a store as a contributing factor to choosing to buy frames in person. Participant #7 said, “I chose to purchase my glasses [in store] because I can physically try them on and see how they fit”. The other three participants also talked about how experiencing physical fit of the glasses was what added to the appeal of trying them on in store. Participant #2 commented on online shopping and mentioned that their experience was not good because they did not have the ability to try on the frames.

**High quality.** Participant #1 was the only participant who considered their glasses from an in store purchase to be higher quality than those purchased online. They said, “The glasses I get from the optical are of much higher quality in all aspects (accuracy, fit, quality of lens, frame)”.

**In optical professional assistance.** Five participants mentioned that an advantage of in store purchasing was having a professional directly assist them in choosing frames and making lenses and taking measurements. When speaking about their last experience purchasing in store, participant # 5 stated, “The only thing I liked about the experience was that I knew my prescription would be accurate since my optometric office was right there so we could verify if there were any necessary changes”. They went on to explain that when

they did purchase glasses online, they still went to the optical store to have them appropriately adjusted by a professional.

**In store insurance coverage.** Participants #2 and #5 both considered the ability to use insurance coverage in store to be a pro for purchasing in store. Participant #5 explained that at the time of their purchase, they were a student at university and had minimal insurance coverage but regardless were able to use the insurance at the store.

In Store Cons:

**In store pressure to purchase.** Two participants mentioned that they felt a pressure to purchase glasses in store from the staff. Participant #4 explained that, “The most difficult parts about purchasing glasses are being harassed by a sales associate when you only want to browse...” and also commented that purchasing in store can lead to being pressured into “buying something you do not like or are interested in”. Participant #5 elaborated on their experience with a sales person stating that, “The associate helping me was trying to push the more expensive frames on me, despite me telling her that I didn’t want more expensive frames since I primarily wear my contact lenses daily”.

**Unhelpful employees.** Participant #6 was the only participant to consider unhelpful employees as a negative in purchasing their glasses in store. They explained that the employee did not have a sense of what they were looking for despite their explanation and that they ended up finding frames in the store on their own without employees assistance. No other participants commented on negative aspects of purchasing glasses in a store.



Online Pros:

**Cheap and easy online.** All seven participants identified shopping online as being inexpensive and an easy process. The term “cheap” is in reference to glasses being inexpensive in price and “easy” as being a painless process to purchase. Participants voiced that they felt online prices were “cost effective” and “fair” as well as being of “great value”. All seven of the participants said that the lower prices online played a role in their decision to purchase online. They also described the shipping and delivery process, with participant #4 stating that their online glasses came in a “timely manner” and participant #6 stating that they receive their online glasses “within two weeks”. Participants also considered online stores to be “easy to navigate” and that they liked the convenience of purchasing online and doing it from “the comfort of your own home”.

**Large selection online.** Three participants thought that there was a larger selection online rather than in stores. Participant #6 mentioned that the reason they decided to purchase online was because they were looking for more unique styles of frames than were available in the stores they had shopped in. Participant #3 liked the variety of sizes of frames online rather than in store, as stores tend to carry majority of frames in average sizes.

**Same quality.** Three participants considered online glasses and in store glasses they had purchased to be of the same quality. This is something they considered to be a pro of shopping online since they were paying less money for the same quality of fit and vision that they received in a store. Participant #6 said, “The satisfaction from the online store is

greater than that of the physical store for me because prices are better and there is more variety for what I feel is the same quality product". The other two participants mentioned that they were satisfied with the online glasses they received in comparison to the ones they had previously purchased in store.

#### Online Cons:

**No Adjustments.** Participants did not specify cons for the purchase of prescription glasses online except for participant #3. They reviewed their online purchase as providing low satisfaction as they could not have them adjusted properly and would have to go into a store to have this done. They additionally stated that they did not like the look of the frames overall and returned the glasses.

#### Influences:

**Recommended by friend.** Three participants were influenced to purchase glasses online because their friends recommended it. Participant #7 stated, "Many people were talking about purchasing glasses online at the time and how they had such a great experience, so I had decided try it for myself". The other two participants had friends recommend a specific website for purchasing glasses, and those participants liked the final product the friend received which influenced them to give online shopping a try.

**Fit and Style.** All seven of the participants said that the fit and the style of the frames is the most difficult part of purchasing glasses. All participants deemed that the right fit and style of the frame are important aspects to consider when purchasing a frame. Two participants

mentioned that they preferred to have professional help with finding the correct fit, while another participant said that they knew the style and fit they liked and can therefore easily purchase online repeatedly. Participants #6 and 7 said that the most enjoyable part of shopping for glasses is trying on the frames and getting a feel for the fit, while participant #5 said that the most enjoyable part is seeing yourself in the frames.

### Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to uncover what millennials living in the GTA consider to be the pros and cons of purchasing prescription eyewear online and in store. It also aimed to answer the question of how influential are these pros and cons in their decision on where to purchase eyewear. The researcher interviewed seven participants in their 20s who live in the GTA and have purchased glasses both online and in store. The interviews were conducted by email, with the researchers sending the participants a questionnaire to fill out and send back. The data was collected, checked for validity, analyzed, categorized and presented as results in the above section.

The main pros voiced by the participants for shopping in store included the ability to try on frames, professional assistance, high quality goods, and ability to use insurance coverage. The cons mentioned by participants were that there was a pressure to purchase in store and that store employees had proven to be unhelpful in picking frames. In terms of online purchases participants liked the inexpensive glasses and ease of ordering online, the large selection offered and that they received the same quality of glasses as they would in store in their opinion. Only one participant disliked the online purchasing process and returned their glasses as they could not have them properly adjusted without going into a

store anyway and they were not satisfied with the overall look of the frames. No other participants voiced cons for online shopping in their experience. All of the participants said that the fit and the style influenced their decision on purchasing glasses, as this is the most “stressful” and difficult part of buying glasses. Three participants also stated that they were influenced to purchase glasses online because it was highly recommended by a friend.

As the researcher completed a comparison of the results of this study to a review of the literature, there were some similarities as well as discrepancies between the data collected and the information in the literature. It is important to note that there is limited to no literature on the purchasing patterns and preferences of millennials when purchasing prescription eyewear.

Dr. Whitney Hauser (2016) highlighted that millennials have less disposable income than past generations due to increase loan and student debt, making their purchasing patterns dependent on necessities and not luxuries. All seven of the participants stated that they appreciated the inexpensiveness and ease of purchasing online. Participant #3 stated that a promotional sale was what convinced her to purchase glasses online, while the others considered even the full price online to be fair and appropriate for their budgets. Evans and Flemming (2018) stated that millennials tend to stay in school longer and are just entering the work force, making their budgeting much stricter, which is reflected in the answers of the participants in this study. They are all educated individuals who are just starting their careers and voiced that they are cost conscious when purchasing something expensive like glasses. Participant #5 stated that “cheaper options are always great” for them. Participant #4 even stated that they would never purchase something online for over

\$100. They went on to say that if they are spending this much or more money on a product they have to see it in person first.

Hauser (2016) also noted that millennials would tend to spend more money on experiences than on objects and tend to be loyal to a brand when a relationship is created. Similarly, five of the seven participants stated that they go to the same optometrist for every appointment, with participant #7 stating that they “like to stay loyal”. Additionally, these participants liked the consistency of seeing the same doctor and the fact that their families are tied to the office and their history of health is recorded in one place. The two participants who stated they use different optometrists said it was due to moving cities, office hours and the fact that they experienced different doctors giving them different findings. Although majority of the participants have a consistent doctor they are loyal to, all the participants tried online shopping for glasses and stated that they enjoyed the lower prices enough to consider shopping online again. This could mean lower prices trump a long-term relationship with an optical store. Although, the relationship created with the optometrist differs from the one created with the sales people in the optical store. Two participants said that they felt employees were too pushy and one mentioned that they were not helpful. Alternatively, the remaining five participants mentioned that the professional help in a store was a pro for in store purchasing. Even though most of the participants appreciate the professional help, only Participant #1 would consider returning to in store purchasing and not purchase online. This calls into question how valuable the relationships are when buying prescription glasses? Is the sales staff not creating a deep enough connection like the doctor is? These are further considerations that are not addressed in this study but could help with further understanding the purchasing patterns

of this generation. Overall, price seemed to be a greater influencer in shopping online than professional help in store.

Mangold and Taken (2012) conducted a study in which they found that millennials are heavily dependent on reading reviews and considering reviews when deciding where to purchase a product or service. Surprisingly, not one participant mentioned reading online reviews when deciding where to purchase glasses. When asked what enticed them to try purchasing online, three of the seven participants mentioned that they tried purchasing online because a friend recommended it, differing from Mangold and Taken's findings of millennials being highly dependent on online reviews. The remainder of the participants said that the price and ease of online shopping influenced them to purchase online. Again, price seemed to play a large role in their decision to move away from in store purchases and try online.

Alderson et al. (2016) conducted a study to compare the quality of glasses from an in store purchase to an online purchase. They found that a significant amount of the online glasses did not meet industry standards (Anderson et al., 2016). Of the glasses that did pass inspection, the customers tended to like the in store glasses better which could be attributed to their overall experience buying in store with a professional (Alderson et al., 2016). The participants in this study tended to like the quality of the online glasses they purchased. They actually stated that they felt the quality was the same, which actually added value to the online glasses, as they were inexpensive. Although participants did appreciate the in store assistance, it was not enough to consider the glasses of better quality. Participant #4 said, "When it comes to the final product (frame and lenses), the satisfaction purchasing in store and online are the same. However, I would say the

experience is quite different. Purchasing in a store allows you to physically try on the glasses to avoid any buyer's remorse. However, purchasing in a store may also include feeling pressured into buying something you do not like or are interested in". The difference could potentially be in the staff's ability to effectively serve people of this generation. Perhaps this could be due to lack of training, company culture or commission that makes some millennials uncomfortable with purchasing in stores despite wanting to try on frames.

In conclusion, price seemed to be the main driver in the decision making of the millennials in this study. Although most are loyal to their optometrists, they were swayed to purchase online due to lower prices and ease of operation, which they considered to be the pros of online shopping. Alternatively, they appreciate the pros of in store shopping such as professional assistance and ability to physically try on frame in a store, although some find that staff can be too pushy. The majority also did not find a significant difference in the quality of online glasses versus in store glasses. Only one participant noted a con with online shopping, namely the inability to get the glasses adjusted after purchase. Finally, every participant mentioned that fit and style influenced where they will buy glasses. They all like the ability to try on frames, but with online stores offering at home try-on, they no longer have to go into a store to take advantage of this pro.

#### Suggestion for Further Research

Looking forward into further potential research, this study leaves open some questions on millennial relationships with brands and if they understand the value that is added in an optical setting. As most of the participants stated they are loyal to their

optometrist, this relationship does not directly reflect to loyalty to purchase expensive eyewear. The current research states that millennials value strong relationships with brands and experiences more than physical purchases, and based on the results of this study, does that mean lower prices take precedence over a long-term relationship with a doctor? Or is the sales staff generally not doing enough to foster a relationship with this young generation? Another area of research could investigate if this is true for just the millennial generation, or are other generations starting to move to online purchases on medical tools such as prescription glasses?

Additionally, some online retailers are opening physical stores, what does this mean for stores that have never been present online? Researches could investigate the likelihood of consumers purchasing online from familiar providers such as their own optometrists, or what online features could these small optical stores add that would boost the loyalty of their consumers?

Another interesting topic to explore is what kind of services are millennials willing to spend more money on, as budget seems to be a key driver in their decision making? A longitudinal study which follows the career growth of millennials and their brand loyalty and spending pattern as their income changes could be an area of interest in predicting how their purchasing patterns may change.

Lastly, although current research suggests that online reviews play a critical role in the decision to purchase a product or service, not one participant in this study mentioned this as an influence on where to buy prescription eyewear. This study did not explicitly ask the participants about online reviews, but the participants did mention taking the advice of friends who have purchased online before them. Future research could look to analyze



when millennials look to online reviews, how they filter through what they deem relevant and accurate and if they perhaps value the experience of people they know over strangers online.

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## Appendix A:

### Letter of Information and Consent

A study about millennial attitudes and preferences of purchasing prescription eyewear

**Capstone Supervisor:**

Dr. Jennifer Matic  
Rochester Institute of Technology  
Rochester, New York, USA

**Researcher:**

Monika Karlovic  
Rochester Institute of Technology  
Zagreb, Croatia

**Purpose of the study:** You are invited to take part in this study, which aims to uncover the preferences and attitudes of the millennial generation when purchasing prescription eyewear, both in store and online. With the rise of online optical stores becoming a threat for optometrists and opticians, it is important to understand the purchasing preferences of this dominant generation so that optical services can better meet the needs of their customers. This study is the capstone project of Monika Karlovic, a Rochester Institute of Technology Masters student studying Service Leadership and Innovation at the Zagreb campus in Croatia.

**Procedure:** You will be asked a series of open-ended questions about your purchasing preferences by the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be conducted online, as you will give written answers to the interview questions. The questions should take between 7-9 minutes to complete.

**Potential Risks:** It is not likely that you will encounter any risks or harm. If there are any questions that make you uncomfortable or you do not want to answer, please inform the researcher when you send back your answers.

**Potential Benefits:** There are no direct benefits to you, but we hope to uncover your opinions and experiences to help build research and information to this specific field of service businesses.

**Confidentiality:** You are participating in this study confidentially. Your name or any information that would allow you to be identified will not be used. No one but the researcher will know whether you were in the study unless you choose to tell them.

**Participation and Withdrawal:** Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is your choice to be part of the study or not. If you decide to be part of the study, you can stop (withdraw), from the interview for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form or partway through the study or up until approximately May 2020. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study.

**Study Results:** If you are interested in knowing the results of the study, please let the researcher know. The capstone will be completed by approximately May 2020, at which time you will receive and email with the study results if you are interested.

**CONSENT**

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Monika Karlovic of Rochester Institute of Technology
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time or up until approximately May 2020.
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study.
- I agree to the interview being audio recorded
- I agree to be contacted about a follow-up interview if necessary, and I understand I can decline this request

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Participant (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's email (for receiving study results): \_\_\_\_\_